

Extension Service
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CONSUMER EDUCATION IN MARKETING

Observation of the Program*

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It has been my privilege during the past several weeks to spend some time in studying consumer education in marketing projects in several States, and this week it has been exceedingly helpful to talk with many of you who are engaged in the project in other States. It seems to me that the importance of this program can scarcely be overemphasized. It provides Extension its first opportunity to reach all people without reference to the place where they live - city, rural areas, or open country. Happily, the program is one of primary concern to everyone. Every person is a consumer - that is, everyone spends more or less time and money in the purchase of food.

Responsibility for the development of the program is in the hands of people who can move ahead quickly. For years, Extension has been discussing with farm people the economic and marketing aspects of food, clothing, housing, and furnishings. The R. M. A. consumer education projects permit much needed emphasis, provide means of bringing together source material and getting it into shape for consumer use, and disseminating it to the increasing number of city people as well as to rural and farm families. Producers have wanted city people to understand the cost of production; handlers have believed that neither producers nor consumers have understood the highly competitive nature of their part of the life-line of food, nor the costs involved.

One of the most valuable aspects of the project and one which may well be pursued is providing opportunity for producers, handlers, and consumers to work together toward mutual awareness of problems. Recently in Newark, New Jersey, I attended a meeting arranged for this purpose. The consumers' interests were given first place on the program. Two homemakers reported and discussed five questions on marketing which several hundred homemakers had answered. Next, a grower presented facts on the farmer's role in producing and marketing fruits and vegetables. He was followed by a representative of a large farmer's market. The retailer's experience was presented next. The nutrition specialist gave a demonstration of good buying practices in purchasing oranges. Under the leadership of the Agricultural Economist of the State College, a panel of these speakers later in the day provided opportunity for the audience to have their questions discussed. Mutual understanding through the presentation of facts, and good will through frank discussions seemed to me to be the important values.

Time spent in Kansas City studying the new regional project, and in Syracuse, where, for years, excellent working relationships between the home demonstration staff, commission houses, wholesale markets, and newspapers, has resulted in marketing information on foods released regularly for consumers' use,

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helped me to understand what an opportunity Extension has to explore and study the effectiveness of mass media. They have been used for years, but in this project their use is essential. Increasingly, they must be used in all Extension work. Is there not opportunity to do pioneering on mass media methods going farther than has been done up to this time in studying their effectiveness?

The opportunity that specialists and resident and research staff members have to reach many people through the project seems obvious. This advantage I noted at Cornell, where three departments - the Department of Agricultural Economics in the College of Agriculture, the Departments of Foods and Nutrition, and Family Economics, in the College of Home Economics, work closely with the persons employed on the consumer education in marketing project for up-State New York, as well as the New York City office of the regional project. It occurred to me that through the project, citizens in cities might become acquainted with the names of college staff members who contribute facts for the use of the project. Are there facts on soils, production, even farm equipment, for example, that would interest consumers? The resources of the college in terms of outstanding people who are working on various foods may well be explored continuously and drawn upon.

In Maryland, I learned of the Baltimore consumer project and the Baltimore urban home demonstration work. The latter was established two years ago by Director Symons, under Miss Kellar's leadership. It seemed to me it was a good example of coordinated effort of a home demonstration agent and the staff of the consumer education in marketing project. The 2000 women with whom the home demonstration agent is working, and all the people who see her weekly television show may get the marketing information quickly and effectively. It occurred to me that when a project is set up, the plans made might well include ways in which all county agricultural and home demonstration agents are to be kept up-to-date, and ways in which they will be helpful to the project staff. The Kentucky project includes such a statement in regard to the home demonstration agents.

In New York City, I found that the staff had faced the number one question - how can one agricultural economist, one home economist, and two or three secretaries develop an effective program in a great metropolitan area? Real progress has been made through planning. Briefly, it appeared to me that first attention is drawn to the project by a few sound dramatic events, such as the Brides' School. Second, the subject-matter meeting planned for professional people - home economics teachers, home economists with utility firms, and newspaper and radio people - who could incorporate the factual material in their programs, extended the office enormously. Third, seeking a sound working relation with people who already have large audiences and could use the material effectively, such as a popular radio personality. Credit to the New York City office was not considered essential. It was assumed, according to the policy of the staff, that credit would follow if the service proved to be reliable and helpful. The value of printed leaflets as a means of reaching many people was recognized. The enormous demand for the leaflets seems to indicate that they meet a need. The Weekly Food Marketing Bulletin, with a balance of material on marketing, nutrition, and food utilization, available to newspapers, magazines, and journals, again makes helpful material available to thousands of people.

The importance of research in nutrition and allied fields was pointed up by Dr. Stanley's contribution at this conference. Undoubtedly, the law which

makes possible the projects on consumer education in marketing will result in closer working relationships between those in research and those extending information. Perhaps the projects for consumers will show the need for better and more extensive research by college departments. It might prove to be one of the most important outcomes of a project.

This week, considerable time has been spent on objectives and definitions of terms. In a rapidly developing field, one observes that this must be done from time to time as experience adds meaning to statements readily accepted earlier.

Integrity in relation to the consumer was stressed wherever I talked with the staff. It has been said in many ways this week. This project is not to exploit consumers, but to help them understand ways in which they can spend the food dollar most intelligently, recognizing, as someone said, that there really are three budgets - nutrition, time, and money. Often, these are reconciled with difficulty. Staff members on the project see clearly that producer and handler, as well as consumer, benefit over a period of time if they are sharing in a continuing educational program.

